

Lincoln University – New Zealand's specialist land-based university

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At the launch of the new Lincoln University brand in July last year, Vice-Chancellor Roger Field explained how and why the University had made the decision to position itself within the New Zealand tertiary education sector as New Zealand's specialist land-based university:

“We have long recognised the value derived from land and the imperative to protect and manage many forms of land, whether it is for its cultural or ecological significance, productive capacity or as an environment where we live and work. We undertake research and educate students in specialist fields that transform land, people and economies.”

Lincoln University has been known for its connections with the land since it was established back in 1878 as a School of Agriculture. Over time the definition of what 'land' means has evolved as the University's areas of teaching and research have developed to meet the needs of a changing world. Now we perceive the definition of land based as: “how people responsibly interact with, create value from and utilise the land for commercial, scientific and environmental purposes”.

This is a much more far-reaching definition than most people might have of land. It not only encompasses the areas we are acknowledged in, for example, agriculture, it also takes in the range of disciplines that have now become part of what we offer.

The idea of not just being connected with the land, but actually being land-based came out time and time again in a series of consultations and a great number of conversations with Lincoln University's stakeholders. Land is an area that distinctively illustrates what makes Lincoln University's programmes special. Land also underpins New Zealand's economic and social wellbeing – it links much of what we do and trade. Both here and beyond our shores, issues around land such as its use, value, protection and productivity, are becoming more and more important.

The decision to be a specialist gives us a unique positioning and demonstrates our commitment to focus on what we see as the real world issues where Lincoln University really can make a difference. Such a decision to be proud of our focus and our expertise in specific areas also sets us apart from other New Zealand universities which have a more general cross section of courses and research.

It's also practical. This University does not have the resources to offer every course to everybody. So we have concentrated on growing our expertise in those areas where we believe we do offer real value. By stating that we are a specialist University, we are openly saying that we are not trying to attract everyone to study here. In other words, we are not just chasing volume. Instead we want the people who choose to come to this University to be looking for a specialist education which will focus on real issues and put them in good stead for a career in an area they are passionate about.

The Department of Environmental Management fits perfectly with the land positioning from a local, nationwide and world-wide perspective. People the world over are dealing with issues

such as resource depletion, air and water pollution and global warming. These issues all relate to how people interact with the land and their environment.

Environmental management is also a specialist area, which means the people coming into the environmental programmes are focused on making a difference. By choosing our specialist university, those with an interest in environmental management can be assured they will be taught by specialist lecturers and be given a specialist research-led education that stands them in good stead for the future.

Lincoln University has made two other commitments publicly which relate to our land-based credential.

The first is that we have said we are 100% committed to transforming land, people and economies. In other words, the University wants to play its part in helping this country, and others, steer a responsible course that balances social, environmental and economic responsibilities. We are keen to roll up our sleeves and through initiatives such as our research programmes, step in and get involved.

Lincoln University also aims to lead the conversation on land. Our experts in environmental management, whether they are staff, graduates or students, have the opportunity to lead the dialogue and debate around land-based environmental issues. We also have a responsibility as a University to help raise the wider definition of land and to highlight the interplays between our activities and our definition, so that people come to see many more activities and sectors as being land-based. We need to help people think of 'land' as an urban as well as a rural concept, for example. We need to consider and reflect on different cultural attitudes to land and its significance.

It is heartening to see that this publication is already well down that path. Reading through previous issues, the majority of articles relate to what we would define as land-based issues – whether it be the Central City Revitalisation Project in Christchurch (Chris Kissling) or dealing with waste in an urban environment in Seoul, Korea (Chul Sohn).

By positioning Lincoln University as land-based we also open doors for more multi-disciplinary teaching and research with a common focus. Areas such as agriculture and environmental management are clearly linked in many ways and our land-based branding encourages this relationship with common goals around New Zealand's (and the world's) economic and social well being.

It should also be clear that the 'New Zealand's specialist land-based university' philosophy is here to stay. There will no doubt be some changes in the yearly marketing campaigns to encourage students to enrol but our pride in being New Zealand's land-based university will only increase over time.

We believe Lincoln University has a vital and important role to play within the University sector. Our hope now is that the University's stakeholders will embrace the opportunities that this position offers all of us, and that we will work together not just to ensure that land-based vocations are respected and rewarded but that land itself, as we have defined it, becomes the wider subject of conversation that it deserves to be, both on campus and beyond.

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